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Viewing cable 06MANAGUA2116, NICARAGUA ELECTIONS UPDATE: WHERE WE ARE NOW

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA2116	2006-09-26 18:49	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

- <http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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DEPT FOR WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL EAID KDEM SOCI NU

SUBJECT: NICARAGUA ELECTIONS UPDATE: WHERE WE ARE NOW

REF: A. MANAGUA 2065

1B. MANAGUA 2044

1C. MANAGUA 1960

1D. MANAGUA 1795

1E. MANAGUA 1388

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Sandinista Front (FSLN) candidate Daniel Ortega remains stagnant in the polls, though within striking distance of victory (using fraudulent means), while the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) under Eduardo Montealegre and the Sandinista Renovation Movement's (MRS) Edmundo Jarquin continue a slow climb, leaving the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) in fourth place. The USG's support for Nicaraguan democracy has enabled the reformist parties to compete with entrenched and corrupt traditional political forces. Post has promoted, and will continue to promote, democratic continuity in Nicaragua by motivating citizens to vote, ensuring suffrage for eligible voters, informing the public, ensuring fairness, and encouraging support for democratic parties, and highlighting the value of Nicaragua's relationship with the U.S. For a more detailed description of Nicaraguan political history, the candidates, post strategies, and USG assistance, please see reftels. End Summary.

Ortega Within Striking Distance of Victory

12. (C) Although approximately two-thirds of Nicaraguans reject FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega, he could still win the November 5 election as a candidate can claim victory with only 35 percent of the valid votes, with a margin of 5 percent or greater over the next closest competitor. Contacts indicate that the FSLN has the ability to "steal" several percentage points using their control of the CSE and other fraudulent means. Although Ortega has yet to show over 35% in national polls, the ongoing Liberal division has prevented Montealegre from reaching that magic number.

13. (C) Recent polls suggest the following range of support for the candidates: Ortega 27%-31%; Montealegre: 21%-28%; PLC candidate Jose Rizo and MRS candidate Edmundo Jarquin: 12%-17%; AC candidate Eden Pastora: 1%-2%. The latest survey, and internal MRS poll (please protect) by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, reveals the following breakdown among 746 likely voters: Ortega: 32%; Montealegre: 27%; Jarquin: 20%; Rizo: 18%.

USG Strategies to Promote Democratic Continuity and Fair Elections

14. (C) Although Nicaraguans traditionally enjoy a high participation rate in national elections, anecdotal evidence suggests some measure of disillusionment with the democratic system caused by persistent corruption in the major political parties and government institutions and a perceived lack of economic advancement. The FSLN, with a highly motivated and organized group of core supporters, would likely benefit most from a high abstention rate. Consequently, post is focusing on the following strategies to encourage high voter turnout and support for the democratic parties:

15. (SBU) Motivating Citizens to Vote: Post is working, through the CEPPE partners, to promote voter participation by funding media public information campaigns, "Rock the Vote" concerts, and a grassroots door-to-door "get out the vote" campaign, including comprehensive coverage of the Atlantic Coast. Public Affairs is sponsoring local NGOs to promote voter education and civic responsibility and has also sponsored a traveling theater group to educate rural voters. Education efforts have focused on youth and rural voters, who are estimated to comprise 60-70 percent of the voting population. We have also encouraged individual political parties to persuade citizens to vote and make sure that supporters can reach polling stations.

16. (U) Ensuring Suffrage for Eligible Voters: Through the political parties, CEPPE partners, and local NGOs, we coordinated a major effort to promote the solicitation and distribution of national/voter ID cards (cedulas). We have also sponsored major studies of the voter list (padron) to identify problems and help voters locate their cedulas and polling stations. Through IFES, we have provided resources to the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) to produce and distribute cedulas and modify polling stations to accommodate handicapped voters. Other partners conducted a study of the cedula application and distribution process to identify weaknesses and make recommendations to expedite cedula dissemination.

17. (U) Informing the Public: Working with local NGOs, post has promoted candidate debates and provided training to political parties on the formation of party platforms. NGO partners have targeted specific populations -- women, youth, and minorities -- with voter awareness campaigns. Post recently organized a seminar to link and publicize party policies regarding the Nicaraguan Defense White Paper and a series of workshops for local journalists to train them on elections reporting. In addition, USAID organized a political party finance conference to educate the public on the need for parties to disclose financing mechanisms.

18. (C) Ensuring Fairness: Post is working very closely with the OAS and local civil society groups to monitor CSE activities and intervene when the CSE makes decisions to favor specific political parties or interests. We have worked with the CEPPE partners and NGOs to thoroughly analyze CSE regulations regarding the elections process (and encourage change in some areas), especially regarding the processes used to nullify voting results. We have provided resources to train poll officials and party poll watchers. The USG is funding a large OAS observer mission -- one of the largest ever conducted -- and post is fielding a separate observation team to provide the widest coverage possible. Through our domestic observation program, we will have near universal coverage of the polling stations (almost 11,000), which will enable us to conduct quick counts of both the presidential and legislative races. NDI will also field a team of lawyers trained in electoral law to respond immediately to polling stations that experience irregularities.

19. (S) Encouraging Support for Democratic Parties: Ambassador and other senior USG officials have made clear statements to the Nicaraguan public that, while they are of course free to choose their political leaders, their choice will have a positive or negative impact on relations with the U.S.

Specifically, we have been clear that an administration lead by FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega could damage Nicaragua's economy if Ortega, as he has stated, attempts to manipulate the market economy, the system of remittances, and the DR-CAFTA framework. We have also encouraged the widespread publication of Ortega's and the FSLN's crimes perpetrated during the 1980s and will distribute a film of interviews of historical figures discussing the FSLN's and Ortega's failures.

¶10. (C) Unification of Non-Corrupt Democratic Forces: We have also made a concerted effort over the past year to create a united front of the non-Alemanista, anti-Pact democratic forces in Nicaragua. Post encouraged and assisted the Movimiento por Nicaragua (MpN), a non-partisan anti-Pact civil society group, from its inception. MpN helped enormously in opening up the democratic space and facing down the Pact forces that threatened to bring down the Presidency several times in 2005. Beginning with the mission of Special Envoy Garza in July, 2005, we sought to break Aleman's stranglehold on the PLC. Those efforts were followed by a visit of Deputy Secretary Zoellick in October 2005 to try to bring Montealegre, Rizo, and current PLC vice presidential candidate Jose Antonio Alvarado together. Since then, Ambassador Trivelli and emboffs have worked persistently to convince decent Liberal leaders at all levels to take control of the party and sideline Aleman. While many Liberal leaders have in fact defected to the ALN, considerably weakening the PLC, the party unfortunately remains firmly in control of Aleman and his cohorts. As the elections draw near, it has become increasingly clear that Rizo and Alvarado have become powerless stooges of Aleman. Repeated proposals by Ambassador Trivelli, Montealegre, the business community, and others to convince Rizo and Alvarado to join Montealegre have failed due to Aleman's power and control over the candidates. After initially accepting the concept of primaries in March-April 2006, Rizo turned down the proposal made by Ambassador Trivelli to have our CEPSS partners organize and conduct multi-party primaries. Later, after initially accepting the idea of conducting a poll to determine the strongest Liberal candidate, Rizo again backed down. At one point in April, Montealegre even accepted the PLC vice presidential candidacy in exchange for a certain number of deputy candidate slots and some key portfolios in the government -- and again Rizo refused. At this stage in the game and given previous results, it appears unlikely that unification of the non-Alemanista Liberal forces can/will take place.

¶11. (S) Likewise, the Ambassador and other senior USG officials have reiterated on numerous occasions that we would have difficulty with a PLC administration under the domination of convicted ex-President Arnoldo Aleman. We have, to the extent possible, assisted investigations against Aleman and his family in Panama, the Dominican Republic, and the U.S. News of proceedings against Aleman and his associates has further damaged his credibility. Emboffs have supported efforts within the PLC and FSLN to cross vote for democratic candidates or abstain from voting rather than return corrupt officials to power. Specifically, post is supporting efforts within the PLC to draw local officials away from Aleman and possibly defect to the ALN. The Ambassador and emboffs have conducted several trips to all areas of Nicaragua to meet with local officials to covey our message directly -- efforts that have resulted in notably increased support for the ALN and MRS in these areas.

¶12. (C) Highlighting the Value of Nicaragua's Relationship with the U.S.: Nicaragua has enjoyed recent visits from several senior USG officials representing USAID, MCC, State, and Congress, who have highlighted the benefit of a positive relationship with the U.S. Specifically, these visitors have explained the benefits of DR-CAFTA on economic growth as well as specific projects undertaken by USAID and MCC. The Ambassador has attended and spoken at dozens of events spotlighting USG assistance from education and health to humanitarian relief and funds for demining activities and assistance for mine victims. Focus group studies reveal that

most Nicaraguans hold a positive view of the U.S. largely due to these activities.

Comment: Planning for a Close Election

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¶13. (S) While post has been successful employing elections funding to open a space for new political parties to contest the entrenched and coordinated interests of the FSLN and PLC, the election will likely be close, with Daniel Ortega capturing the largest number of votes in the first round. We are working with the international and local observer groups to discuss scenarios and responses should the FSLN declare a first-round victory by fraudulently widening the margin of votes between Ortega and his second closest competitor (probably Montealegre). Knowing that Ortega has a strong chance of losing in the second round, the FSLN will make a concerted effort to ensure a first round win for their candidate, or possibly attempt to disqualify Montealegre by using the FSLN-PLC dominated courts to convict him of wrongdoing in the CENIS (debt bond) case.

¶14. (S) The role of the OAS observation mission will be key in this regard. In meetings last week with OAS Undersecretary Dante Caputo and mission leader Gustavo Fernandez, Ambassador Trivelli stressed the need for the OAS to step in and defend against any FSLN/CSE attempts to disqualify and/or steal votes to obtain the margin of victory. Caputo and Fernandez were clearly cognizant of their responsibility in this regard, and appeared prepared to do what they can to prevent such occurrences, but it would nonetheless be useful for WHA and USOAS to continue to impress upon the OAS team (as we will) the important and proactive role they will have to play should this scenario come to pass.

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